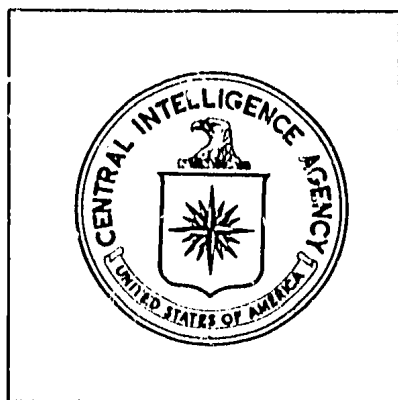


CIAOGCR      RP 75-20      May 75

Korean Fishing Areas in the Yellow Sea—Spawning Ground . . .

C      1 of 1  
GCR-RP 75-20



*Korean Fishing Areas in the Yellow Sea—  
Spanning Ground for Maritime Conflict*

~~Confidential~~

GCK-RP 75-20

May 1975

**NATIONAL SECURITY INFORMATION**  
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KOREAN FISHING AREAS IN THE YELLOW SEA --  
SPAWNING GROUND FOR MARITIME CONFLICTIntroduction

Maritime incidents in the Yellow Sea annually involve the fishing fleets and naval forces of North and South Korea, particularly during the peak May-September fishing season. Tension has increased markedly since October 1973 when North Korea claimed and periodically began to patrol parts of South Korea's claimed territorial waters. In the latest incident on 26 February 1975, the South's sinking of a North Korean fishing boat in international waters (see Map 1) caused the scrambling of aircraft from the two countries and including U.S. aircraft as well. The underlying causes of these incidents are varied but are primarily related to disagreements over maritime boundaries that prevent access to coastal and offshore fishing grounds. (C)

Fishing incidents are generally of two types -- coastal and offshore. The coastal incidents occur within sight of land in the coastal fishing grounds west of the Military Demarcation Line (MDL) (see Map 1) and involve the seizure of the South's small coastal fishing vessels by North Korean patrol boats. This kind of incident is a frequent occurrence; boats and crews are generally detained and, after the crews are given a thorough propaganda treatment, both are released without harm. More serious clashes take place in fishing grounds farther offshore in the international waters of the Yellow Sea. Both countries have had boats -- generally modern motor-driven trawlers from their offshore fishing fleets -- sunk in these waters. (U)

Coastal Incidents

South Korea's fleet of small, wooden, unpowered or underpowered vessels based along the coast west of Seoul and on the coastal islands provoke most incidents in coastal waters. Fishing

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NOTE -- This paper was produced by the Office of Geographic and Cartographic Research. Comments and questions may be directed to [REDACTED] Code 143, Extension 3057. For a detailed examination of the territorial issues, see The West Coast Korean Islands, BGI RP 74-9, January 1974, Confidential/Control Dissem.

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methods employed are primitive and navigation gear crude or nonexistent. Attempts to fish in traditional fishing grounds, now bisected by political boundary lines, have brought the fleet into constant conflict with North Korean patrol boats and with its own government. (U)

Discounting the aggravating effects of fishing, the immediate coastal waters west of the Han River Estuary would probably remain a source of friction because of conflicting territorial seas claims (see Map 2).<sup>\*</sup> The territorial seas problem arose with the signing of the 1953 Korean Armistice which left five island groups, all located near the North Korean mainland, under the jurisdiction of the United Nation's Command (UNC). (U)

Since October 1973 North Korea has claimed that the islands lie within its 12-mile territorial sea.<sup>\*\*</sup> Complicating the issue is South Korea's own claim of a 3-mile territorial sea around the islands and the probable overlapping of this claim into North Korean inland waters. An additional jurisdictional problem is the Northern Limit Line (NLL), the antecedent of which was unilaterally established by the UNC in 1961, whose intent was to prevent maritime incidents by barring South Korean military and commercial vessels from sailing north into "hostile waters." The NLL, however, lies completely within North Korea's claimed territorial sea and intrudes into inland waters in at least three places. Although the Republic of Korea (ROK) Government claims the NLL is a seaward extension of the MDL, and hence a de facto boundary between North and South, the NLL has no basis in international law and has never been recognized by P'yongyang. (C)

This complex of overlapping maritime boundaries forms the geopolitical framework for the area's coastal fishing activities; but the fleet's traditional fishing grounds and its fishing methods, developed before the political division of the peninsula and in harmony with the somewhat distinctive temperature and

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*\* All baselines and territorial seas limits referred to in this report and shown on the accompanying maps are hypothetical since neither nation has officially delineated its claim. They have been constructed in order to maximize the probable claims of both nations.*

*\*\* Territorial seas, measured seaward from a baseline, form territory over which a nation has exclusive sovereignty conditioned only by innocent passage, a right often restricted by special regulations promulgated by the coastal nation. Inland waters, landward from a baseline, are those waters over which a nation exercises the same sovereignty it exercises over its land territory. Distances throughout this study are in nautical miles.*

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tidal conditions of the Yellow Sea, also figure prominently in causing maritime incidents. The large seasonal fluctuations in water temperature generally govern the broadscale migratory patterns of the important species of fish. Warmwater-loving species spend the winter in the warmer East China Sea off the south coast of Korea (see Map 3). The rapid warming of the shallow coastal waters during spring encourages the fish to migrate northward along the west coast of Korea where they stop to spawn, particularly in the Han River Estuary. As fall arrives and water temperatures cool, the fish move away from the coast and migrate south for the winter. The Yellow Sea's tremendous tidal range -- averaging 19 feet in the estuary -- creates powerful tidal currents that control local fishing methods and other maritime activities. (U)

The Korean coastal fishing fleet operates under the simple principle of "follow the fish," and thousands of fishing boats follow these fish migrations north along the west coast during spring. The shallower spawning grounds are particularly attractive to coastal fishermen using small boats and primitive fishing techniques. In May these boats move into the area around Inch'on for the corvina spawning season, remaining through September to fish for anchovy, saber fish, mackerel, lobster, shrimp, and other species. (U)

The most lucrative corvina fishing grounds are located in shallow waters around the ROK-controlled islands of Yonp'yong-do and U-do, an area termed the "Golden Fishing Site" by ROK fishermen. This fishing ground is bisected by the NLL and almost certainly lies completely within North Korea's 12-mile territorial sea. The South's coastal fishing vessels, following the corvina and positioning their boats to take advantage of the tidal currents, regularly ignore existing political boundaries. This is an understandable maneuver as a boatload of corvina may bring up to \$1,500 on the market. The fleet often shows the same disdain for political boundaries in fishing for the other important species during the remainder of the summer fishing season. (U)

Stow net fishing, the most successful fishing technique developed by area fishermen to adapt to the tidal conditions, also helps cause territorial violations. In stow net fishing, the boat is anchored and a net is propped open on the sea bottom facing into the prevailing tidal current, which carries fish into the net. This technique is most effective in fishing for corvina and saber fish in the shallow coastal waters from Inch'on west along the south coast of North Korea. (U)

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Seoul has been ineffectual in its attempts to control this independent, market-oriented fleet. In the 1950s a Fishery Control Line (FCL) was established south of the NLL to create a buffer zone free of ROK fishing vessels (see Map 4). By some estimates, this restriction was costing area fishermen some \$36 million per year in lost revenue in addition to being a psychologically bitter pill to swallow. In the past few years, the line has been adjusted northward for 2 months effective 1 May in order to permit corvina fishing even further north in North Korean claimed territorial waters. The South also regularly assigns naval boats to patrol the area in an often futile attempt to keep their fishing boats south of the FCL. This means, however, that ROK patrol boats are frequently inside waters claimed by the North. The increased tension between the two countries, resulting from North Korean actions of October 1973, caused Seoul in April 1974 to move the FCL even further to the south to increase the distance between its fleet and the North. (C)

No strategy is likely to be completely successful because of the economics of the situation and the fishing crew's knowledge that they will be returned unharmed if captured by the North. In contrast, the North has had much more success in controlling its own coastal fishing fleet. They do less fishing in the sector of coastline near the NLL, their boats are under tighter governmental control, and the best fishing is often nearer their own coastline. (U)

#### Offshore Incidents

Offshore incidents are also caused by fishing patterns in conflict with political boundaries. The fishing boats normally operating in offshore areas of the Yellow Sea are from North and South Korea's fleets of trawlers and purse seiners. These are motorized vessels in the medium-sized range, usually from 20 to 100 gross tons, and capable of fishing in the Yellow Sea on a year-round basis. (U)

The offshore territorial problems are less complex than in the coastal waters nearer the Demilitarized Zone. The boundary line responsible for most offshore incidents is the NLL which at its western terminus is 12 miles off the North Korean coast and about 100 miles northwest of the ROK mainland. Until October 1973, mutual observance by both North and South Korea of the NLL -- and its de facto extension westward -- effectively divided the Yellow Sea fishing grounds and separated the fishing fleets. (U)

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The occasional offshore violations of the NLL usually are caused by individual boats in overzealous pursuit of schools of fish. The northwestern sector of the NLL cuts across the migratory paths of the many species of fish as they move with the seasonal variations in water temperature (see Map 3). In late summer and early fall, corvina, anchovies, saber fish, mackerel, and many less important species move parallel to the NLL and out to sea before heading south to winter. Each fall boats from both countries fish these moving schools in the vicinity of the NLL, and the opportunity for maritime incidents is thus increased. During winter most of the ROK fleet turns south to follow the southward movement of fish. The North Korean fleet, though, remains concentrated off their southwest coast because winter fishing is better there than off their icy northern ports. Consequently, winter incidents are more likely to be caused by an errant North Korean boat. (U)

Both countries use a combination of fishery control lines and naval boats to protect their offshore fleets. Fishery Control Lines are easier to enforce in the offshore area because tidal currents are weaker and fewer fishing boats are involved. But often the solution is part of the problem. By aggressive patrolling or overreacting, the naval ships may turn a simple problem of straying fishing boats into a major maritime incident. (U)

#### Potential Trouble Spots

Map 5 shows the specific areas and times where fishing incidents are likely to occur:

... Near the Yellow Sea coastline during the May-September spawning season, and especially during the May-June corvina season in the "Golden Fishing Site."

... In the offshore fishing grounds near the northwest sector of the NLL, especially during the fall-winter fishing season.

... In an area around the NLL between the ROK-controlled island groups.

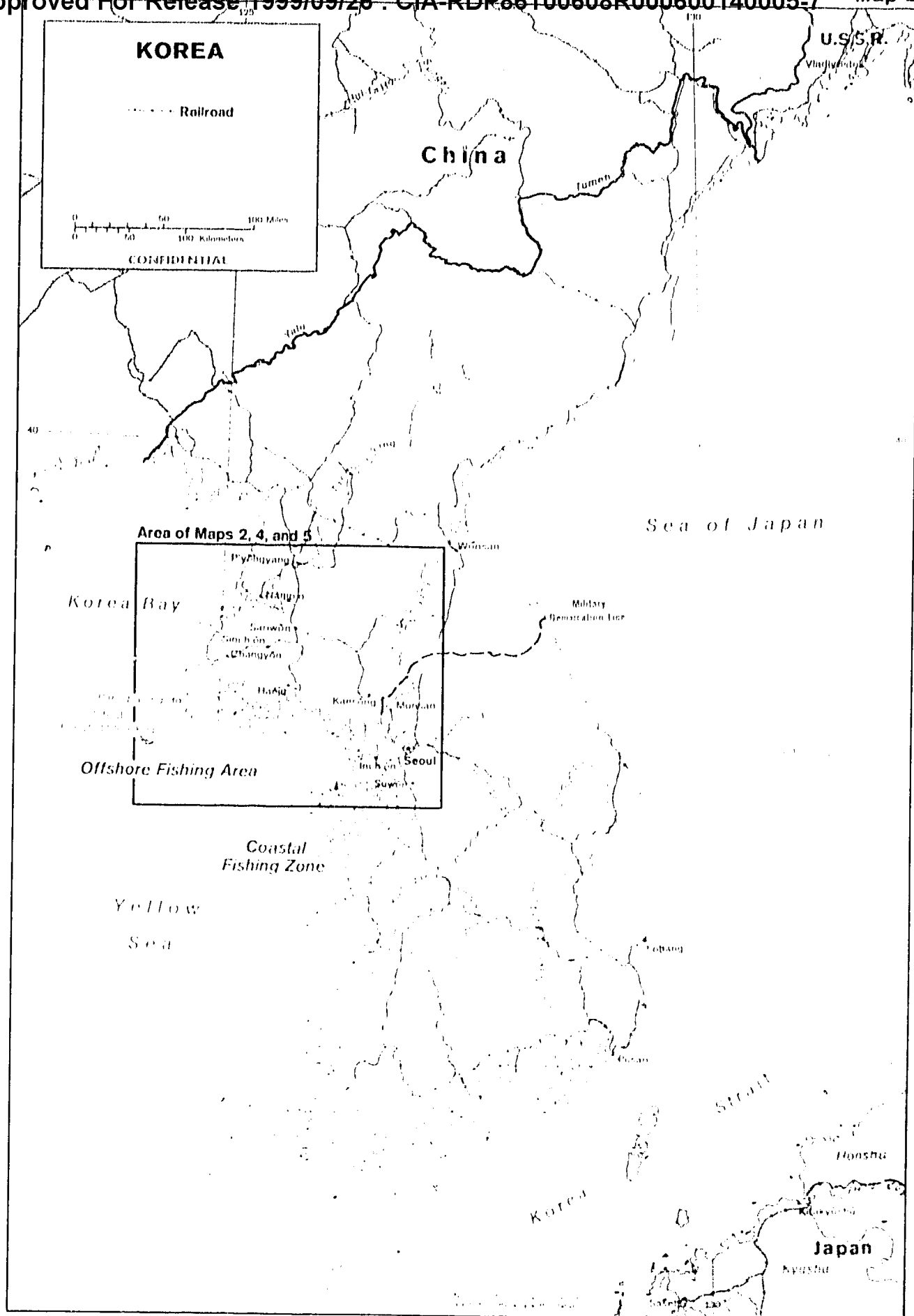
This latter area is located in an open stretch of the sea in which Seoul has no territorial sea claims and where the NLL lies completely within the limits of North Korea's territorial seas. This sector of the NLL has kept the North Korean fishing fleet from passing through its own territorial sea into international waters, and

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barred the fleet from the west coast's best fishing ground (see Map 3). The economic situation, plus P'yongyang's legitimate claim to its own territorial seas, make it an area of year-round concern. (U)

Since October 1973 the North has been trying to assert a claim to waters within its 12-mile territorial sea and call world attention to the fact that its vessels are being denied passage through international waters. Evidence indicates that North Korea is intent on gaining a greater share of Yellow Sea fishery resources and better access to its growing naval, commercial, and fishing port of Haeju. After the sinking of its fishing boat in international waters south of the NLL on 26 February 1975, the North stated at the 350th meeting of the Military Armistice Commission that its fleet had a right to fish there. Recent North Korean naval and air operations also presage a future forceful assertion of fishing privileges and other economic claims to waters south of the NLL. (C)

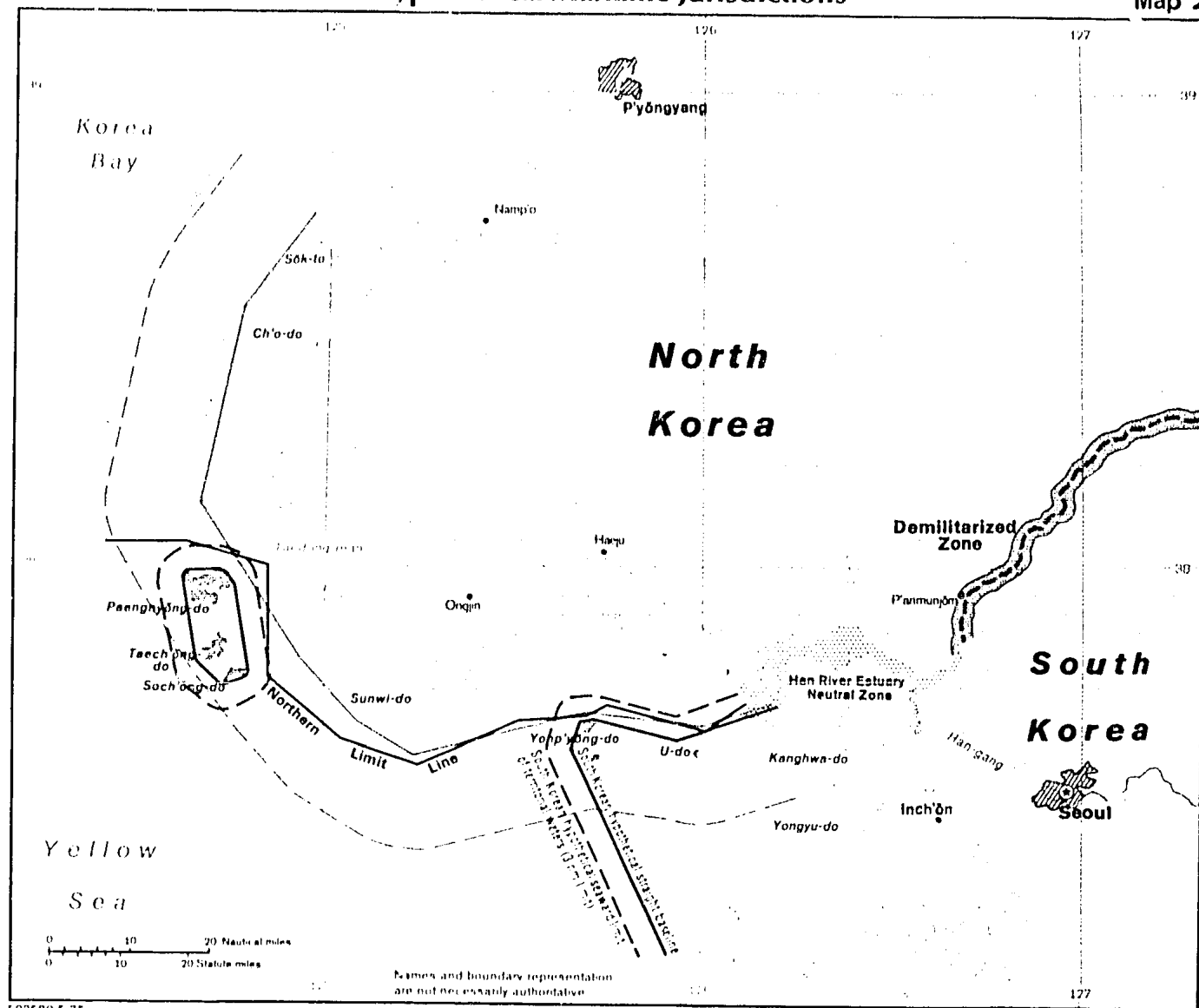


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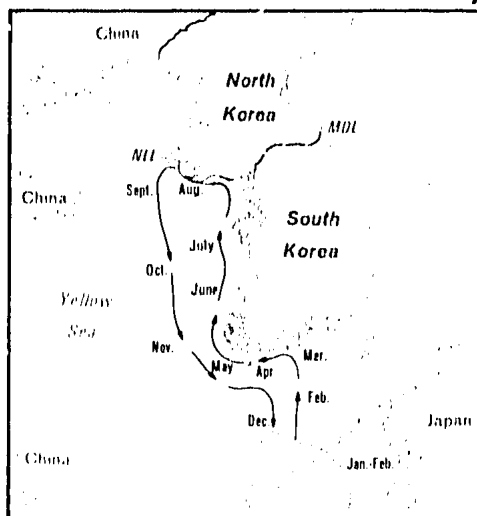
# Hypothetical Maritime Jurisdictions

Map 2



**Anchovy**

**Map 3**

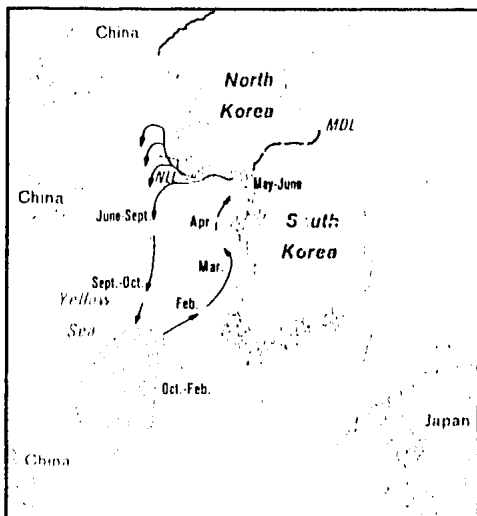


## Migratory Patterns of Selected Fish Species

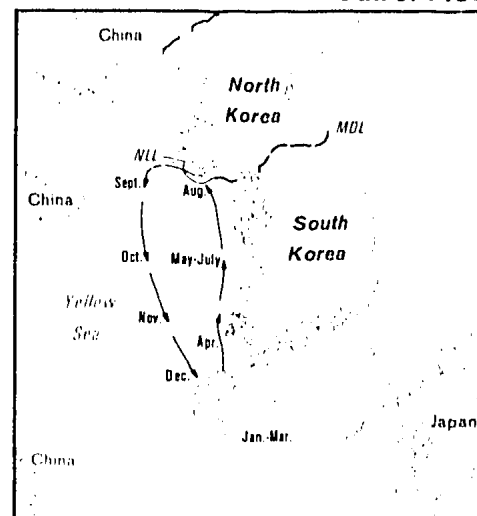
Spawning area  
Wintering area  
MDL Military Demarcation Line  
NLL Northern Limit Line

Arrows and months show general locations. Any unseasonal variations in water temperature will cause migratory patterns to change.

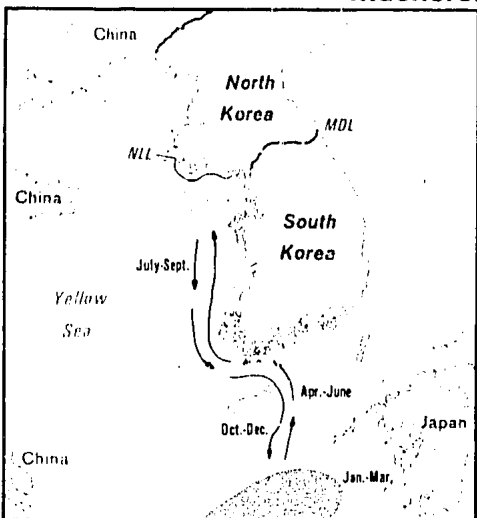
**Corvina**



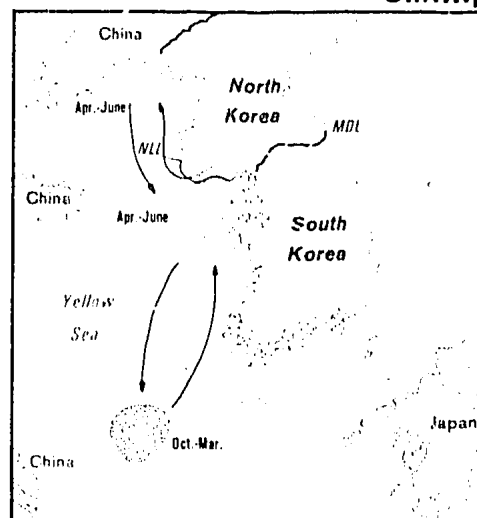
**Saber Fish**



**Mackerel**

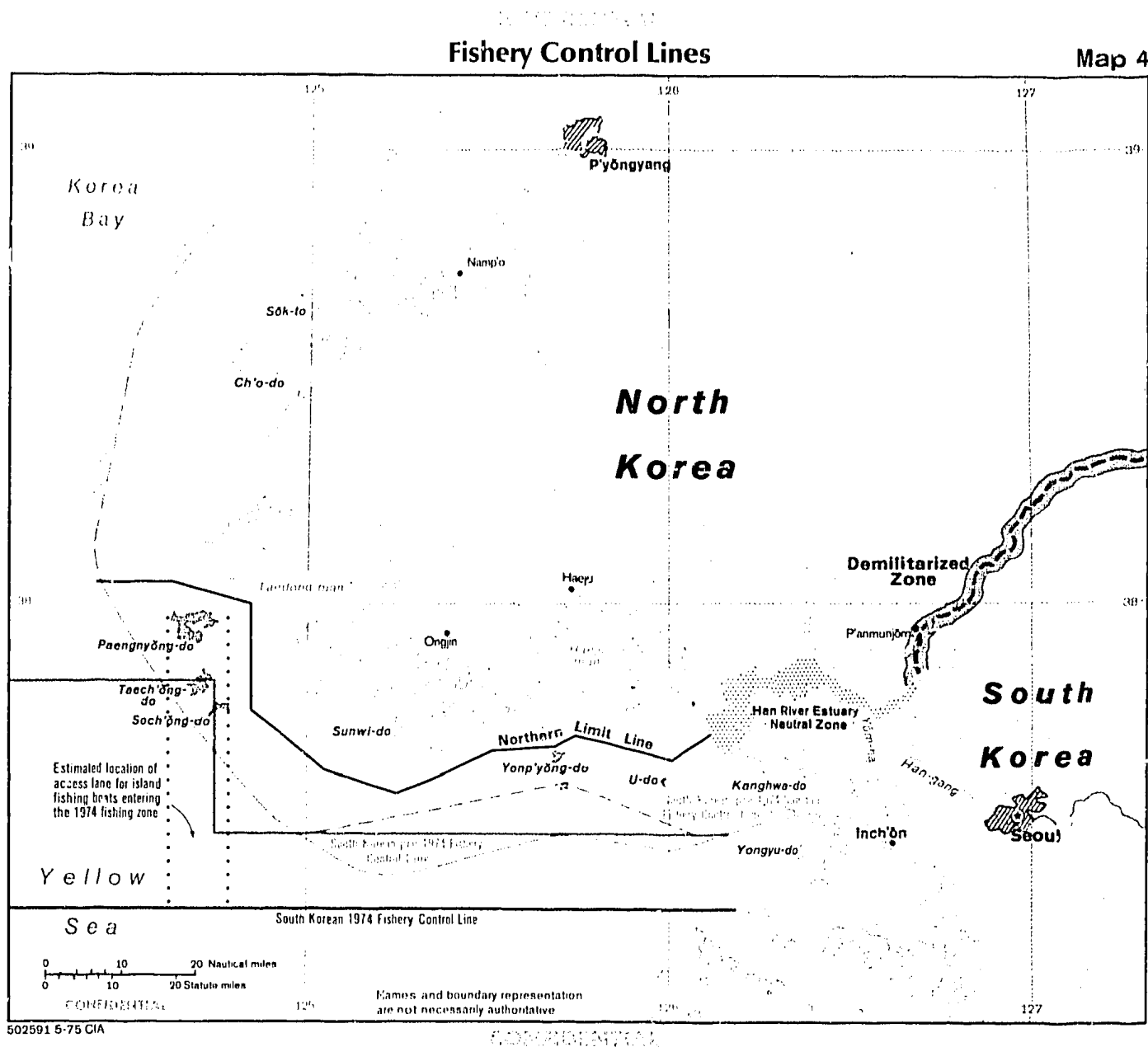


**Shrimp**



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Names and boundary representation  
are not necessarily authoritative



### Map 5

